DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 887 EC 161 108

AUTHOR Dick, Marlene A.
TITLE Alternatives in Evaluation and Grading of Special Needs Students. Missouri LINCpaper 823.
INSTITUTION Missouri Univ., Columbia. Coll. of Education.
SPONS AGENCY Missouri State Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, Jefferson City. Div. of Special Education.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 7p.; The document is a publication of Missouri LINC.
AVAILABLE FROM LINCpapers/Missouri LINC, 609 Maryland, University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, MO 65211.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; Evaluation Methods; *Grading; *Graduation Requirements; Individualized Education Programs; Nontraditional Education; Secondary Education; *Student Evaluation; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

The paper addresses problems and strategies for evaluating mainstreamed students in vocational education classes. In addition to grading concerns, the area of graduation requirements is also considered. Alternatives to traditional methods of evaluation, including competencey based evaluation and adaptation of assessment techniques are described as ways to assess performance while still allowing for individualization. Alternatives to traditional grading approaches are also identified, including use of "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" markings, written evaluations, skill reports, self-evaluation, contract grading systems, and allowance for flexibility in class time. Among alternatives to graduation requirements noted are course substitution; modification of curriculum, method, evaluation, or materials; provision of additional time to meet requirements; and adaptation of traditional coursework to include work study, work training, independent study, and credit for part-time work experience. Finally, the role of the individualized education plan and the individualized vocational plan in evaluation is discussed. (CL)

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# Alternatives in Evaluation and Grading of Special Needs Students

by Marlene A. Dick, M.A.

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## Introduction

Special needs students are being mainstreamed into vocational education classes, and vocational instructors are asking for assistance in working with these special populations. One of the areas they are particularly seeking assistance in, is the area of evaluation. Vocational instructors have found difficulty in applying traditional evaluation methods to students with different ability levels. This difficulty has caused instructors to sometimes resist mainstreaming. This monograph is developed to assist vocational instructors in developing alternatives for evaluation, grading and graduation requirements.

## Evaluation

According to Erickson (1976) evaluation is judging the adequacy or worth of a particular performance or sample of student's knowledge, skills or feelings. There are many reasons for evaluating students:

- to assess the student's present level of performance
- to assess readiness for future units of instruction
- to determine the quality of student's work compared to others
- to assess the effort put forth by the student
- to determine the relative improvement of the student compared to past performance (Vasa, 1981).

Teachers also gain from the information they acquire when evaluating students. Evaluation helps teachers:

- plan programs and instruction
- select learning activities for each learner
- communicate student progress to others, i.e. administrators, parents, employers (Wentling, 1978).

## Grading

Grading represents judgments which a teacher makes about a student's achievement of the objectives and criteria of a course (The Center for Vocational Education, 1977). Traditionally grades are communicated using the A, B, C, D, and F reporting system. Macer (1978) states that traditional grading can have damaging effects on special needs students who already have varying degrees of insecurity and low self-esteem. Grades can also have similar effects on other students.

## Graduation

Requirements for graduation are usually a set number of credits in specified courses with acceptable grades. Educators, especially administrators, are finding it difficult to determine appropriate graduation requirements for special needs students.

Traditionally, evaluation and grading attempts to assess students by comparing them to each other to determine the level of achievement gained. A student may make significant gains in achievement when compared to his/her past performance or to the amount of knowledge he/she had before instruction. Yet when compared to other students in traditional evaluation and grading systems, the gain may not be apparent. The student has accomplished much, but is penalized by comparative grading.

# What are Evaluation Alternatives?

Several alternatives to traditional methods of evaluation are available. These alternatives will adequately assess a student's performance and yet allow for needed individualization.

## Competency Based Evaluation

One alternative to traditional evaluation may be competency based evaluation. Oliver (1978) describes competency based evaluation as a) specifying the job-related tasks a student needs to learn in advance, b) providing instruction in the tasks and c) measuring and certifying that students can perform the tasks. Redick (1980) further describes competency based or criterion referenced evaluation. In this system, each student is evaluated in terms of his/her achievement level before instruction begins and at the conclusion. The grade depends upon progress toward pre-determined criteria. Each student is measured and evaluated independently of others in the class.

## Adaptation of Assessment Techniques

Redick (1980) also states that tests or assessment techniques may need to be adapted to meet special needs students. Vasa (1980) provides an excellent listing of alternative assessment techniques.

**Types of Modifications**

| | |
|---|---|
| • **verbal tests** | administer test verbally by teacher, peer paraprofessional or other |
| • **shortened test** | reduce the number of test items to permit additional time or remove items which have a higher level of difficulty |
| • **frequency of tests** | use short written or verbal measures on a daily or weekly basis to allow for more feedback on student progress |
| • **length of time** | increase the amount of time to complete the measure to allow for slower writing, reading or comprehension |
| • **types of responses** | provide for short answer or simple marking; types of responses should be matched to student's strengths |
| • **verbal review** | have students review the course or unit content verbally; student is not limited to test item recall |
| • **peer tutoring** | use peers for teaching and testing; peers should have training and be monitored |
| • **product** | have students develop a product or package to show knowledge of unit |
| • **checklists** | use to observe and record learning; permits teacher to limit number of formal tests |
| • **class interaction** | assess participation in discussion which indicates mastery of content |

**CHECKLIST**

Student _____ Course _____ Dates From _____ To _____

| Objective & Tasks | Introduced | Partial Mastery | Mastery | Descriptive Assessments | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Will answer phone and accurately record customer orders on form | X | | | 1. Can describe the steps involved | 10/5 |
| | | X | | 2. Needs to improve initial greeting and price quotation responses | 10/9 |
| | | | X | 3. Can perform total transaction effectively and efficiently | 10/18-10/24 |
| Will ring up sales on cash register, following steps in manual | | X | | 1. Is accurate in procedure but needs to increase speed | |
| | | | | 2. | |
| | | | | 3. | |
| | | | | 1. | |
| | | | | 2. | |
| | | | | 3. | |

**Figure 1.0 Example of a Checklist**

# What are Grading Alternatives?

The vocational instructor now has several alternatives to traditional evaluation techniques. What about alternatives to traditional grading? There are several grading or recording systems which can help the instructor in grading special needs and other students.

## Various Grading Systems

The Center for Vocational Education (1977) provides an overview of various grading systems. The following is a brief description of these:

- **satisfactory-unsatisfactory**—useful when the instructor needs to determine if the student's performance meets a certain standard. S/U grades can reflect minimal competency, i.e. 80% of the test items correct, or maximum competency, i.e. 100% safe operation of equipment.
- **written evaluations**—are very helpful and worthwhile because they are specific and detailed. Comments should be sufficiently factual and well documented. Written evaluations can be coupled with traditional grades.
- **skill reports**—are checklists of competencies or objectives students have successfully completed and can also be attached to traditional grade reports (Figure 1.0).
- **self-evaluation**—teaches students to assess their own performance and behavior. Students fill out checklists, write evaluations, and discuss their evaluation with the instructor.
- **contract grading**—allows students to make a contract with the teacher for a particular scope of work and to receive a predetermined grade after meeting the terms of the contract. Contract grading is highly motivating to many students, and gives them an opportunity to develop self-discipline and personal responsibility. Contracts should tell teacher and student: 1) what the student will do (objectives) 2) how well the student will do it (evaluation) and the 3) time line (if appropriate). (Figure 2.0).

## Flexibility of time in Class

Another possibility suggested by Macer (1978) is flexible time in class. Special needs students might spend additional time in a course to complete the requirements, or enroll in limited sections of a program or course, completing one section at a time. The instructor and student might also identify other job/training options which require mastery of partial course content, such as training to be a gas station attendant rather than an auto mechanic.

Any of the above evaluation and grading alternatives can be coupled with traditional reporting systems and even added to a school districts permanent records. Written evaluations, skill reports, contract objectives and results can all be converted to letter grades used in traditional school systems. Letter grades can reflect the level of competence students have reached.

# What are Alternatives for Meeting Graduation Requirements?

Some handicapped students can meet existing graduation requirements. These students should be considered the same as any other student for purposes of issuing a diploma. That is, once they have completed the criteria for graduation from high school, they should receive a regular diploma. To deny granting a diploma to these students once they have earned it would violate Section 504, the Federal statute prohibiting discrimination on the basis of handicap.

Other handicapped students are able to meet the regular graduation requirements, but because of their handicap, they do so differently than their non-handicapped peers. There are at least five types of modifications which can be used to enable these students to fulfill their graduation requirements (Midwest Regional Resource Center, 1980).

**CONTRACT**

Course:

Student: Teacher:

Dates: From _____ To _____

Goal(s):

Objectives: Evaluation: (Checklist or Descriptive)

I agree to complete the above goals and objectives satisfactorily.

Student _____ Date _____

I agree to help the student complete the above goals and objectives.

Teacher_____ Date _____

If the student completes the goals and objectives satisfactorily he/she will receive a grade of _____ .

**Figure 2.0 Example of a Contract**

## Course Substitution

A deaf student, for example, may be permitted to substitute an art appreciation or music history course for a required course in music appreciation. A physically handicapped student may receive adaptive physical education. Whenever a student's handicap makes participation in a course inappropriate, unduly difficult or meaningless, another course should be substituted which satisfies the intent of the requirement.

## Curricular, Method, Evaluation or Materials Modification

The manner in which courses are conducted may have to be adjusted to accommodate a student's handicap. For example, adjustments in practical art courses or in science laboratories may include the use of brailled texts and a student partner assigned to a blind classmate.

## Additional Time Required for the Completion of Degree Requirements

Time needed to complete assignments during the school day, extending the semester or even the basic four year requirement by delaying graduation may be necessary. For example, students with health impairments, who lack stamina and must be absent frequently, may not be able to attend a full-day of classes or carry a normal load. It may take such students longer to finish high school. Likewise, a learning disabled or emotionally disturbed student who attends regular classes but is heavily dependent on resource room support in order to pass the classes may be unable to carry a full schedule and receive the specialized instruction needed to pass the courses.

## Special Instructional Design

There are still other handicapped students who are unable to meet requirements for graduation in terms of academic subjects. The educational needs of these handicapped students are so severe that the major or entire portion of their schooling requires specially designed instruction and takes place in a special education program. There are two alternatives for more severely handicapped students. They are:

**Develop special education curricula that corresponds to regular curricular areas**—Essentially this would mean developing a Special Education English program, a Special Education Social Studies program and so on. Handicapped students would then be able to acquire the requisite units of credit distributed according to required subject areas. Defining requirements in terms of areas of study instead of required courses allows the flexibility needed to accommodate varying needs of students. Thus, consumer survival, self-help skills, and other activities of daily living usually needed by special education students could satisfy the requirements for graduation. Diplomas would be awarded to handicapped students who complete a special education program without differentiation. Differences between the special education program and the regular school program would be noted on the student's transcript of records.

**Standards Based on the IEP**—Without a special education curricula the members of the IEP team must prescribe performance standards each student must achieve in basic skill areas, in order to receive a diploma.

## Alternative Experiences

Traditional coursework can be adapted to assist students in meeting graduation requirements. Many districts are granting credit toward graduation for alternative educational experiences. These types of experiences can benefit special needs students. Alternative experiences can:

a. be developed which adapt to the individual learning styles of students as well as to their objectives.
b. assist students to avoid failure; they provide a fresh start for students in trouble.
c. reallocate school resources from remediating problems to preventing problems.

There should be a clear connection between the student's educational goals and the alternative experience. With this in mind, districts can often provide a variety of educational experiences such as:

- **Work Training Programs**—This option allows students to explore career interests in occupational fields through a program not offered in the regular or special high school curriculum. The school can often provide course work pertinent to these careers and coordinate a work experience program with employers that enables students to obtain on-the-job training in an occupation of their choice.
- **Work Study Programs**—This combination affords students an opportunity for earning income while attending school at least half-time. Such programs may be offered in conjunction with cooperative vocational education or special education.
- **Credit for Part-Time Work Experience**—Students with employment experience may obtain credit for work experience as a substitute for class attendance and course or unit of credit requirements. The district may award credit if the student's work experience resulted in learning outcomes that relate to the student's educational goals.
- **Early Graduation if Accepted in Program of Vocational Training or Upon Job Entry**—Students age sixteen or older with two full years and ten credits of completed high school including demonstrated job proficiency or one credit in a vocational course may graduate early. A diploma may be granted after successful completion of the equivalent of two years of vocational or on-the-job training, such as in a Vocational Rehabilitation Program.
- **Credit by Examination**—Students may be allowed to demonstrate their knowledge and skills by passing a performance test in lieu of attending classes in required or elective courses. Not only may the required course be waived, but credit units may be granted upon passing.
- **Independent Study**—Students may be permitted to independently complete the requirements for credit in required or elective course areas. This option may be particularly necessary for students who are frequently absent during school hours.
- **College Credit Alternative**—Handicapped students who are accepted into an accredited post-secondary institution after three years of high school may be granted a diploma following successful completion of two semesters of college.

# What Part Does the IEP/IVP Play in Evaluation

Whenever a handicapped student receiving full or part-time special education and related services needs a modification of evaluation requirements because of his/her handicap, the modifications to be made should be according to the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP team should consider and specify where necessary the following points about evaluation, grading and graduation requirements:

1. Any adjustment in time needed by the student to complete the course(s), assignments, tests, and high school itself;
2. The approved course substitution(s) or alternative educational experiences to be taken by the student for credit toward graduation requirements; and
3. The performance indicators, objective evaluation methods, criteria and schedule for the evaluation of alternative experiences.

Using the IEP the school is able to individually set standards for graduation which take into account the student's abilities, needs, and interests. The student in special education is eligible for a regular diploma once the goals in the IEP have been met. Since attainment of the annual goals on the IEP demonstrates successful completion of particular requirements for graduation for that student's program, it becomes critical to review the IEP whenever the student is not progressing at the rate anticipated.

The IVP or Individualized Vocational Plan is a planning document, similar to the IEP, used by vocational instructors. Information from the IEP meeting about the student's strengths and weaknesses, and IEP goals can be recorded on it. Using the IVP the vocational instructor can plan for resources, and specific course objectives, modifications and any alternative or regular evaluation methods to be used with a student. (Figure 3.0).

It is important to remember that there are some handicapped students who do not have IEP's. These students do not require special education and are enrolled full-time in regular education programs. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1974 indicates there is no specific form, such as an IEP, on which to document changes needed for these students. It is suggested, however, that districts record adjustments on the students cumulative record folder and maintain, as part of the student's file, evidence indicating the requirements were fulfilled.

**INDIVIDUALIZED VOCATIONAL PLAN**

Class _____ Student _____

Teacher _____ Dates From _____ To _____

Course Goals and Objectives: (a) student will acquire entry level job skills by completing course objectives in 1st year Food Service. (b) student will develop appropriate work habits and behaviors. (c) student will increase sight word vocabulary related to food service. (d) student will learn computation needed in food service work.

| Student Information: Strengths Weaknesses | Teacher's Resources: | Courses Objectives: | Any Modifications Needed: | Evaluation: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| good classroom behavior<br><br>low reading level 2<br><br>low math skills<br><br>high interest in food service<br><br>good manipulative skills<br><br>can learn tasks by demonstration well<br><br>not a self-starter<br><br>learns better thru visual and auditory mode | -curriculum books from IML<br><br>-Vocational Resource Educator (VRE)<br><br>-Spec. Ed. teacher<br><br>-filmstrip series from Bennett | will be able to:<br><br>-measure quantity foods | -have spec. ed. provide extra practice in measuring | student will be able to:<br><br>-measure 10 recipes accurately |
| | | -read recipes and follow directions | -have spec. ed. teach food service terms<br><br>-have VRE find recipes written in simple format | -read and complete directions on 10 recipes accurately |
| | | -use good sanitation and safety practices<br><br>-use equipment properly | -filmstrips instead of chapter<br><br>-same as rest of class<br><br>-equipment-same | -clean work area and use safety practices daily |

**Figure 3.0 Example of an IVP**

# Summary

The information provided by these alternative evaluation, grading and graduation methods can give administrators, students, counselors, parents, future employers and future teachers of the student detailed information which describes more accurately what the student knows and can do. Probably what should be important and reported to the student, parent, and potential employer is not so much the awarded grade or diploma as the competencies that have been achieved and at what level of proficiency. These alternative evaluation methods can also help special needs and other students feel more successful and self-confident, and ease the burden of evaluation that instructors often feel. Alternative evaluation merits consideration in the classroom, and can prove to be particularly valuable in a vocational class with special needs students.

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## About the Author:


Marlene Dick is coordinator of Publications for Project LINC and a doctoral student in Vocational Education for the Handicapped at UMC.

MissouriLINC operates within the University of Missouri-Columbia Departments of Special Education and Practical Arts and Vocational-Technical Education, College of Education. It is funded through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Division of Special Education, in cooperation with the Division of Vocational Education, Vocational Special Needs Programs. It is through the concern of DESE that this project is available to provide these services at no charge to the public school personnel in the state of Missouri.

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